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KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

SUCCESS STORY

Seeing is Believing

A public information campaign convinces residents that their contributions will bring water.



Sabyr Atajanov, Uzgen City Council Chair explains to two community groups how their contributions would be spent in rehabilitating the water system.
Photo: Urban Institute

“Our efforts will never be properly appreciated and we will never gain the support of the population until we learn to provide full information on both our activity and our problems.”

-Sabyr Atajanov, Uzgen City City Council Chair.

City living was no fun for residents in Cheremushky district in the city of Uzgen. Using buckets, apartment dwellers had to bring water in and sewage out – up and down five flights of stairs every day.

Then came the opportunity to invest in the city’s water supply system with donor funding. Only, the donor required a sizable matching contribution and residents had long ago given up hope that anything would change and were skeptical to give money.

Work on the rehabilitation of the water and sewerage system was stalled because of a lack of residents’ contributions. So the City Council Chair Sabyr Atajanov utilized the principles of a USAID training to design an information campaign.

More than 500 citizens in groups representing different parts of the community – “aksakals” (respected elders), men, women, youth, business leaders, teachers, healthcare workers, and city council deputies – were given a tour of the works completed so far. City staff had neighborhood meetings explaining to residents how their contributions would be spent. Parents learned about it through essays written by their children at school, and billboards showed before and after photos of the improvements.

Thanks to the public information campaign, the city was able to collect contributions sufficient to complete the waterworks. With completion of the rehabilitation to the water network, several thousand people now have potable water. And the residents proudly boast to guests how they made it happen.

USAID’s Decentralization and Local government Program aims to strengthen channels of communication and information between municipalities and citizens. This experience reinforced in the mind of city leaders that being open with their citizens about problems as well as successes will make them more effective.